

Teaching Literacy in the Content Areas

Literacy is the foundation of knowledge acquisition; therefore, all students must know how to read and write in the content areas to achieve. Effective content area teachers help students successfully and productively access, read, and understand text. As a content area teacher, it is your responsibility to teach literacy in your area to ensure students' success in the subject.

Students need support with learning the skills that reinforce how to attack new text, solve problems, and learn new content. Texts are one of the tools of the trade for students. If students know how to read them and use them, there is a greater chance of transferring and retaining important and relevant content. When this happens, the success rate for students to know, understand, and be able to successfully perform in the content area will be greatly increased.

Suggestions for teaching literacy in all content areas:

- Teach, model, and share with students what good reading and writing looks like and sounds like in a content area.
- Teach critical academic vocabulary:
 - ▶ What is the essential vocabulary in the content area?
 - ▶ Coach students to learn and speak the language of the content.
 - ▶ Hold students accountable for the vocabulary.
- Set a purpose for reading
 - ▶ Why do we read? In school we read to increase content knowledge!
 - ▶ Talk about what has been read. Discussion creates dialogue and understanding.
- Use the reporter's questions to engage students: "Who, what, where, when, why and how?" for each reading assignment.
 - ▶ Reflect, share, and write about what has been read. Remember, reading and writing go hand in hand. Have you achieved your purpose for reading? Ensuring that all students comprehend is grass-roots formative assessment.
- Connect the reading between subject matter and real life. Relevancy is often the key for student buy in.
- Have students reread text
 - ▶ Rereading will reinforce and strengthen the content of the assignment.
 - ▶ Often, even experts miss things the first time around.

- Use multiple strategies to support literacy

- ▶ Model and support students to master a range of literacy strategies.

- ▶ Highlight key strategies.

- ▶ Discuss with the students when, why, and how to use literacy strategies.

- ▶ Have students reflect on their own literacy experiences and identify literacy strategies that are best suited for their own style of learning.


Content area teachers
need to use strategies to
provide students access
to the texts—not to be
reading teachers in the
intervention or remedia-
tion sense—that is for the
reading class . . . Both are
critical.

Dr. Anita Archer

Strategies to Support Literacy

- Graphic organizers – Help students visually organize and understand content. Try word maps, Venn diagrams, story maps, flow charts, or compare/contrast organizers.
- Think-Pair-Share – Have students think and write about what has been read and share those thoughts with a partner and/or class.
- Think diagnostically – What do the students know, need to know, and understand? Constantly question and check for understanding during literacy experiences.
- Chunk text – Break text into meaningful, but shorter units.
- Scaffold text – Have students try choral reading, close reading, and partner reading.
- Anticipation Guides – Activate prior knowledge by asking students what they think about certain ideas.
- Active Participation – Look for ways to make literacy a relevant and dynamic experience. Students that are on-task will experience increased achievement.
- Verbal Responses – Have students try choral responses, responses to partners, and individual responses.

Selected Resources

 For a list of resources to help you infuse literacy into your curriculum, visit the PaTTAN website at www.pattan.net.

References

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